

COMMENTARY

ATOMIC FORCE AND FOREIGN POLICY

Can the "New Pacifism" Insure Peace?

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THE actions and pronouncements of the government of the United States since the great international crises of November 1956, the British White Paper on defense of April 4, 1957, and the private warnings addressed by Bulganin to the British and French governments in the fall of 1956, all agree on one point: rejection of the use of force, except in self-defense, as an instrument of national policy. When Bulganin wrote to Eden on September 11, 1956, that "it is no longer possible to threaten and brandish weapons . . . any military measures directed against sovereignty and territorial integrity . . . can end only in failure"; when he wrote to Mollet on the same date that "in the age of atomic weap-

"Atomic warfare is impossible—it is suicide for all concerned," we say nervously, and yet the U.S. and now Great Britain too are stripping their conventional defense establishments so as to make it impossible for them to fight anything but an atomic war. Or if not fight, HANS J. MORGENTHAU warns, capitulate. Professor Morgenthau, director of the Center for the Study of American Foreign Policy at the University of Chicago as well as Visiting Professor at Columbia and Yale, is the author of such works as *The H-Bomb* (1950), *In Defense of the National Interest* (1951), and *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (1946). Readers will recall his article, "The Revolution in U.S. Foreign Policy" in our February issue.

ons, one must not threaten to use arms or brandish arms," he anticipated Eisenhower's statement of November 1: "I, as your President am proud—and I trust that you are proud—that the United States declared itself against the use of force in, not one, but both of these cases [Egypt and Hungary]." The British White Paper draws the practical conclusion from these statements by asking for a military establishment which is geared to preventing wars rather than fighting them.

What the Kellogg-Briand Pact envisaged in 1929 as a legal obligation and a moral postulate appears to have become reality in 1957. Swords are to be beaten, it is true, into guided missiles rather than ploughshares, yet the result still appears as the achievement of the Biblical vision of eternal peace. Contemporary Western society, profoundly pacifist except in the face of patent provocation, is easily tempted to accept this conclusion without examination, especially since not accepting it would necessitate a great moral and intellectual effort without promising to produce so clear-cut and satisfying a result. However, the popularity of the argument that war is no longer possible calls for, rather than allows us to dispense with, a critical analysis of its logic and assumptions.

The new pacifism, as expressed in the

consensus of our quotations, differs fundamentally from the traditional pacifism of which the Kellogg-Briand Pact is the most notable modern manifestation. Traditional pacifism, aside from its moral revulsion from violence, argued that any war was an irrational way of settling international disputes. War does not solve anything. War does not pay. Nobody has ever won a war. War is the "Great Illusion." "There never was," Benjamin Franklin wrote to Josiah Quincy on September 17, 1773, "a good war or a bad peace."

Nevertheless, while statesmen paid lip service to the pacifist arguments against war, especially in the inter-war period, their actions belied their protestations. War continued to be regarded, as it had been throughout history, as a rational instrument of national policies. Statesmen continuously weighed the advantages and risks of employing the peaceful means of diplomatic pressure and negotiation against those of the threat and use of force. They might be mistaken in choosing force if they could obtain their goals by peaceful means or if they lost the war. Yet even then their choice was a rational one because the risks they took were not out of proportion to the objectives sought. By and large, statesmen acted like gamblers who commit only as much of their resources as they can afford to lose. If they win, the gain justifies the risk taken; if they lose, the loss sets them back—but not necessarily beyond possible recovery. Even the Second World War conformed to this pattern: the risks taken were commensurate with the objectives sought.

THE feasibility of all-out atomic war has completely destroyed this rational relation between force and foreign policy. All-out atomic war, being an instrument of universal destruction, obliterates not only the traditional distinction between victor and vanquished, but also the material objective of the war itself. In the pre-atomic age, it would have been perfectly rational for the United States to go to war in order to

liberate the nations of Eastern Europe, provided that liberation had a sufficiently high priority among American national objectives, and American power appeared sufficiently strong in relation to the opposing power to have a chance of success. In the atomic age, however, the United States has emphatically ruled out the use of force to liberate the satellite countries; she was afraid, rightly or wrongly, that the threat of force in Eastern Europe might lead to all-out atomic war. The Soviet Union has for the very same reasons denied herself the use of force with regard to Western Europe, which cannot be defended against the Red Army. In the Korean war, both sides refrained from committing, qualitatively and quantitatively, more than a fraction of their resources and from exploiting their strategic opportunities to the full and thus granted "privileged sanctuaries" to each other, fearful as each was lest one provoke the other into an all-out atomic war.

All-out atomic war, no longer being considered an instrument of national policy, has taken on a function which is novel at least in its exclusiveness. Traditional force is an instrument for breaking the will of the opponent, either through successful defense or attack; it is in the effectiveness of its physical application that its primary function lies. But the primary function of all-out atomic force lies in making its physical application superfluous by deterring the prospective opponent from using it. While traditional force operates psychologically through the intermediary of actual physical employment, all-out atomic force has a psychological function pure and simple. The prospective opponents are kept constantly aware of the inevitability of their own destruction should they resort to all-out atomic force, and this awareness prevents them from resorting to it.

It is worth noting that in the pre-atomic age the threat and the counter-threat of force could always be, and frequently were, put to the test of actual performance, and either the threat or the counter-threat was then proved to be empty. In the atomic age,

the very purpose of threat and counter-threat is to prevent the test of actual performance from taking place. The appearance of possessing both the ability and the resolution to make good threat and counter-threat becomes, then, of paramount importance as a condition for the success of mutual deterrence.

The nature of this condition, it will be noted, is political rather than military. For what is essential is the *appearance* of possessing the ability and resolution to make good threat and counter-threat, not the reality of such possession. In order to make mutual deterrence work, two nations need only to create the mutual belief that they are willing and able to destroy each other in all-out atomic war. As long as this belief exists, it is irrelevant whether or not the reality corresponds to it. In other words, the mechanics of mutual deterrence require an element of bluff, either real or suspect.

At this point, the mechanics of mutual deterrence raise a most serious political dilemma. No nation can afford to yield to a threat of all-out atomic war that is only a bluff; nor can it afford to stand up to a threat that turns out not to be a bluff. Miscalculation is bound to be fatal either to the interests of the nation concerned, if it yields to the bluff, or to its existence, if it stands up to an atomic threat that is not a bluff. And the trouble is that a nation cannot determine when the other side is bluffing without the test of actual performance—a test which it is the very purpose of mutual deterrence to avoid.

Is there any issue at all, short of self-defense, for the sake of which either the United States or the Soviet Union would be willing to blow up the world? Is the Soviet Union justified in believing that the United States will really blow up the world in defense of Western Europe? Was the United States correct in assuming in November 1956 that the Soviet Union would be willing to blow up the world in defense of Hungary? And would the Soviet Union in November 1956 really have taken the chance of an all-out atomic war by sending

volunteers to the Middle East and attacking Great Britain and France in defense of Egypt?

The philosophy of mutual deterrence answers these questions in the negative. For it assumes that no nation will resort to all-out atomic war on any conceivable issue short of all-out atomic attack against itself; that is, no nation will ever start an all-out atomic war, hence all-out atomic war has really become "impossible."* However, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union has pretended to act on that assumption. The United States has refrained from certain actions because she feared the Soviet Union might reply to them with all-out atomic war, and the Soviet Union has threatened certain actions which at least implied the possibility of all-out atomic war. Thus the pacifist confidence of the official pronouncements is belied by the—positive or negative—concern with all-out atomic war reflected in official actions.

THE new pacifism, consistent within itself but not with the political attitudes of governments insofar as all-out atomic war is concerned, raises another fundamental problem for the day-to-day conduct of foreign policy without providing a satisfactory answer. It proposes to eliminate the use of force of *any kind* by the same means it has thus far successfully employed in staving off all-out atomic war: deterrence.

The deterrence to be exercised against the use of force which falls short of all-out atomic war and may be called conventional, is supposed to be "graduated," that is, commensurate with the force threatened. The use of force is to be prevented by the threat of counterforce sufficient to deter the prospective user. But is graduated deterrence with conventional force likely to operate with the same degree of reliability which has thus far enabled all-out atomic deterrence to prevent all-out atomic war?

That the certainty of complete atomic

*I have examined this philosophy in detail in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 1956.

destruction constitutes an absolute deterrent to all but madmen stands to reason. But what are the conventional weapons in the arsenal of the Western powers by which they hope to deter prospective opponents from using conventional force? They are two: a rudimentary conventional military establishment partially armed with tactical atomic weapons, and what has been called "moral suasion."

The unilateral partial disarmament of the Western nations as regards conventional forces, coupled with their primary reliance upon tactical atomic weapons, casts doubt on the feasibility of graduated deterrence. It does so for two reasons.

FIRST of all, tactical atomic weapons are obviously not of the same broad, well-nigh universal applicability as are bullets, shells, and bombs. In street fighting, guerilla war, and night operations in jungles and mountains—to mention only a few contingencies—atomic weapons may be of little if any avail. To the degree that atomic weapons are recognized by the nation to be deterred as being blunt weapons or weapons impossible to use at all under the circumstances, the nation that threatens their use will be considered to be bluffing, and the threat will not deter.

Furthermore, and most importantly, the element of bluff, actual or suspect, is bound to figure much more prominently here than with respect to the all-out atomic deterrent. What tactical atomic weapons can do in actual warfare is still largely a matter of conjecture. No nation will lightly employ such an untried weapon, especially in view of the choices before it should tactical atomic weapons prove to be ineffective.

These choices are three, all of them unsatisfactory in different ways. The nation can accept defeat and give up the fight. Or it can continue fighting with non-atomic conventional armed forces, running the risk of its unpreparedness in this respect. Or it can resort to ever more powerful atomic weapons until in the end it finds itself face to

face with that unacceptable contingency which all its policies were intended to obviate: all-out atomic war. We should not have to remind ourselves, though the prevailing complacency makes it necessary to do so, that these uncertainties and risks are magnified by the possibility that the nation to be deterred may also be provided with atomic weapons, tactical and strategic. In other words, "graduated deterrence" is a two-way street.

That under such conditions a nation would follow up its threat with actual atomic warfare, however limited initially, is possible but certainly cannot be taken for granted. Yet to the degree in which it is not taken for granted by the nation to be deterred, the threat must lose its deterrent effect. The Secretary of State of the United States has let it be known that he takes pride in his "brinkmanship," which three times—in Korea, Indochina, and Formosa—led him to the brink of war but not over it. Regardless of the actual historical circumstances under which the use of force was here averted, there can be little doubt that "brinkmanship" cannot be practiced indefinitely without challenge, and that must be even more true of what might be called "open brinkmanship, openly arrived at"—that is, "brinkmanship" whose deterrent effect is counteracted by retrospective boasts as well as by the official rhetoric of pacifism. Sooner or later someone will want to know whether the statesman approaching the brink is serious or bluffing, whether he will jump or pull back. Then the alternative will be war, or peace by appeasement. Let us not forget that Germany attacked Belgium in 1914 and Poland in 1939 on the assumption that Great Britain was bluffing and would not fight, an assumption derived primarily from Great Britain's reputation for pacifism.

However, the new pacifism claims to provide still another alternative to the alternative of war or appeasement: "moral suasion." Little need be said to show that "moral suasion" is a euphemism for impotence. There are only two ways in which men, acting for themselves or for their na-

tion, can be dissuaded from taking a certain course of action: the promise of benefits and the threat of disadvantages. No man has ever been thus dissuaded by abstract references to the moral law or by entreaties to be good. Religions have had to rely upon promises of heaven and threats of hell in order to influence the behavior of their adherents. More particularly, a statesman who has resolved to use force in support of a certain policy cannot be expected to yield to "moral suasion" unless it is backed up by promises or threats.

THE dilemma that confronts the Western world today as it contemplates the use of force is only partly the consequence of the unacceptable horror of all-out atomic war. In good part, too, it is the consequence of the "new look" of Western military policy. For what makes it so difficult for the West to contemplate the use of force is its own tendency, created by its new military policy, to identify force with atomic force. Yet the use of atomic force, however narrowly circumscribed by the initial intent, entails the enormous and unbearable risk that it may develop, imperceptibly but inevitably, into the use of all-out atomic force.

The nations of the Western world could have avoided this dilemma if they had continued to maintain a non-atomic military establishment sufficient to support their foreign policies. They have said that they

cannot afford to maintain two military establishments—one designed to deter all-out atomic war, the other to wage non-atomic conventional war. To say this is tantamount to saying that—in contrast to the Soviet Union which continues to support two military establishments—the richest, politically and technologically most advanced, and still most powerful combination of nations on earth cannot afford to protect their interests without running the risk of universal destruction. Which is another way of saying that they cannot protect their interests at all, insofar as that protection requires the use of force.

The truth is that financially, economically, and technologically, they can well afford two military establishments. What their leaders think they cannot afford is the political courage to demand of their peoples the sacrifices necessary to protect and promote their national interests under the condition of atomic peace. In a word: the deficit is political and moral, not economic and financial.

With the decision to scrap traditional military establishments and arm its remnants with atomic weapons, the Western world may well have passed the point of no return. At the end of the road that the new pacifism has begun to travel there may indeed lie peace, either the peace of appeasement and ultimate surrender or else the peace of Babylon and Carthage—the peace of total destruction.